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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic approach was used to examine the development, over 14 months, of a design curriculum for third-year architecture students. Issues concerning methods of curriculum inquiry and the formation of theory from case study data are also addressed. The major conclusion of this case study is that the teacher was the curriculum. He is described as a professional architect-turned-teacher, who planned, implemented, and analyzed a design curriculum based on his theory of design--encompassing function, structure, and aesthetics. Examples of his style in evaluating students' work are also recorded. The author feels that the ethnographic techniques used in this study--participant observation, in-depth interview, key informant data, and specimen records-- enable the researcher to understand the architect's world from the architect's point of view. This approach is recommended for other curriculum studies. (Author/GDC)

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THE DESIGN OF DESIGN: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF CURRICULUM CONSTRUCTION-- FINDINGS AND RESEARCH ISSUES

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> "Any scientific understanding of human action, at whatever level of ordering or generality, must begin with, and be built upon, an understanding of the everyday life of the members performing those actions. To fail to see this and to act in accord with it is to commit what we might call 'the fallacy of abstractionism.' That is, the fallacy of believing that you can know in a more abstract form what you do not know in the particular form." (Douglas, 1970)

At the particular level, this paper describes and explains the construction of a design curriculum for third-year architecture students by a professor of architecture. At the more abstract level, this paper deals with questions of method appropriate for curriculum inquiry and addresses the implications of building theory from case study data. Imbedded in both levels is the story of one person, a professional architect who became a professor of architectural design.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY: MILIEU

This study was undertaken for a period of fourteen months, from November 1978 through January 1980. Field work was undertaken until June 1979. Interviews continued through January 1980. I became a participant-observer in the design class for third-year architecture students after gaining entry as a researcher on teaching. I came to know the "architect turned professor," the fifteen class members, and took part in all aspects of the class except submitting drawings.

I interviewed the professor formally and informally and interviewed key students in the class informally. Basically, my data consisted of field notes, records and taped interviews.

The setting for the study was a small polytechnic institution on the West Coast. I came to select this professional architect after randomly questioning students as to who the "best teachers" in architecture were. Two names were suggested. I spoke to both people and selected Professor Kane[1] based on his willingness to participate in the study and his ability to articulate what architecture meant to him.

THE MAN, THE ARCHITECT, THE TEACHER

> "First of all, I want to preface my remarks by saying that this is not a critique of you. We are learning from each other here... Don't take it personally. You have to build a sort of rhinocerus hide in art. You can learn from all the critiques. We have a potential for maximum learning in minimum time so let's look at these drawings in that vein and see what we see." (1--26--79)

As Joshua Kane[1] spoke these words, he stood at the front of our semi-circle with professional impertinence. He stood with his hands behind his back and his feet squarely in view of the fifteen of us. He peered through his dark-framed glasses clearing his throat and signaling that remarks were about to begin. His gray wool slacks were pressed and looked like new. The mustard and harringbone suitcoat appeared even crisper. A few feet from the massive display board

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[1]This name is used to assure confidentiality and anonymity. All names used in this transcript have been changed for these reasons.

he turned and the sun caught his gold tie clip horizontally in line with the grey stripes of the tie.

Thirteen of the fifteen drawings were displayed. He walked with determination and seriousness toward the first drawing. A quick twinkle in the eye and slight touch of a smile signaled relief to the students. It was striking how so much anxiety could be felt in the studio yet Kane spoke each word of the critique with confidence, honesty, compassion and patience. Each word was chosen with care and razor-sharp precision. One by one each student heard twenty to thirty minutes of remarks which would later become his/her individualized program for Architectural Design Class #341.

Professor Kane planned and developed his Design curriculum over a 25-year period. This began prior to and during the years he received his degree in Architecture from Yale University. Following internship and licensing, he had his own practice. He then taught at the university level in Kansas and Utah with part time practice. Following this, he returned to fulltime practice in California, finally deciding upon fulltime teaching. He has been a fulltime professor of Architecture for the past thirteen years.

> "I wanted to teach to have time to think. There was no time for that in the business. I also wanted to develop a philosophy of design." (1--7--80)

In addition to teaching, he spent a sabbatical year at U.C.L.A. as a research fellow engaging in a study of visual perceptions related to architecture.

His philosophy of design was fine-tuned during five of the thirteen years at the setting of this study and during his sabbatical leave. Professor Kane is continually polishing his theory for a textbook on the theory of design in architecture. Presently he is involved in this endeavor as a major goal as an architect and teacher.

His entire philosophy revolves around the premises that design is a rational activity and that art and science are mutually complimentary and necessary facets of architecture "the Mother of the arts."[2] The vocabulary he uses in lectures, work sessions and critiques is the vocabulary of the professional architect. He models for his students the meanings of the words he uses and the philosophy he has constructed and explained to them.

> "My underpinning basis for teaching design is an anomoly. I emphasize logic, scientific fact, precise thinking...ultimately, art and science come together. Their common arena is a humble search for fundamentals. There is a strong desire to know in both art and science. You look outward and inward at once. There is a power in the cosmos that one can see (in design). Design is a spiral slowly rising, slowly narrowing, never reaching the end, returning back to our own thinking with more observation more insight. Out of that kind of inquiry you look through the glass with clarity. I always say there are two teachers--Nature and History, that's what I want my students to know." (11-29-78)

He further identified his major purposes in teaching as the following:

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[2]This statement was used by Kane paraphrasing Frank Lloyd Wright's comments on architecture as the "Mother art."

> "I want my students - think, to tap their own creativity. Some of them just don't have what it takes to be an architect. Their critique process is like psychoanalysis because the design reflects the individual inner self, the subconscious. I don't withhold much from them. I tell them when they are not sufficiently prepared for architecture. I don't want to damage their tenacity or stamina and I don't want to squelch their creativity--still I have to temper it so that I provide some feeling of adequacy." (2--7--79)

Sometimes this could be frustrating for him since part of his curriculum included observation of natural phenomenon.

> "Sometimes I wonder if I should teach at all. Why should I teach my life's work to some people who may not understand? I aks them (the students) to observe but they're passive. This is the passive generation. Twenty years ago, if I spoke about the character of wood, for example, all the people would have, by that time, worked enough in wood so I wouldn't have to lecture about the properties of wood. They all watch TV. The paradox is that they watch TV, but don't know how to observe." (2--5--79)

From statements in the interviews and from observations, I came to understand Professor Kane's earnest desire "to know" and "to search for fundamentals." (1--12--79) Historically, this desire to know began early in his life.

Growing up in the Midwest, he had an opportunity to study drawing at the school of the local art institute. He nurtured his talent by "building his own toys and solving problems on a day-to-day basis." (11-20-78). He was affected by wartime and enlisted in the Air Force. His day-to-day encounters with life-death situations as a flier on reconnaissance missions and in Air Force Intelligence prepared him for architecture by forcing him to deal with moral and aesthetic considerations.

In addition to his involvement with his work as an architect, Professor Kane remains active and controversial on University-wide committees. At home he engages in various household projects which involve design and building. He is a lapidary enthusiast with equipment for cutting and polishing stones. His love for water colors has prompted his wife Audrey to continue developing her talent as a painter. Kane is a connoisseur of fine art and architecture. At an early age, he encouraged his daughter, Rebecca, to develop her own artistic talents as he was encouraged to do as a child.

METHOD USED IN THIS STUDY

I gained entry into the setting by introducing myself to Professor Kane as a researcher on teaching who intended originally to study teaching at the university level. I was welcomed into the design class and immediately accepted by Professor Kane and by the students. About halfway through the first term the students talked to me as one who knew about architecture. Actually, I knew only what I had read about it and what happened in class and interviews. The relationship which developed between Professor Kane and myself could be characterized as a mentor relationship, a friendship between scholars with similar interests and colleagues. We often spoke of the difference in lifestyles between the East Coast and West Coast and I believe these initial conversations led us to building trust and accepting each other at the early stages of the study.

I prepared two interviews prior to going into the class and an interview every six weeks thereafter. The interviews were developed based on information from the pilot study of two weeks and various data from the class sessions. Two of the interviews were focused on Professor Kane's beliefs about architecture as a profession and about design as a prerequisite to being a professional. One of those two tapes focused on the rational elements of design in his own terms.

Field notes were taken throughout classes, work sessions and critiques. Some field notes were written upon returning to my own office where I recorded my impressions of his statements or actions and when I noted to myself that I needed to research something. For example, I checked on Frank Lloyd Wright's statements on architecture after Kane had referred to them during a lecture. Another time, a reference to Paulo Soleri and others forced me to seek out information regarding their work.

My units of analysis for this study were the statements and actions of the architect. I categorized these units into the following areas:

I. <u>STATEMENTS</u>

- A) Goal Statements
- B) Attitude Statements
- C) Statements about Students
- D) Belief Statements
- E) References to other Architects
- F) Statements on Teaching
  - 1. Rewards
  - 2. Frustrations
- G) Statements on Professionalism

II. ACTIONS

A) In-class Activities
B) Field Trips
C) On-campus Activities outside of teaching
D) Critique Sessions
E) Work Sessions in Studio
F) Contents of Lectures
G) Planning
H) Actions of a Professional nature

After selecting these categories, on a bi-weekly basis, I recorded the frequency of such statements and actions and their distribution. For example, in nine out of ten class sessions, Professor Kane would reiterate the basis of his design philosophy which he lectured about. In addition, he only used the Socratic method in critiques, that is, questioning students so as to make the students come up with an answer themselves. On the other hand, in lectures, he seldom used the Socratic method, yet he did use rhetorical questioning at that time.

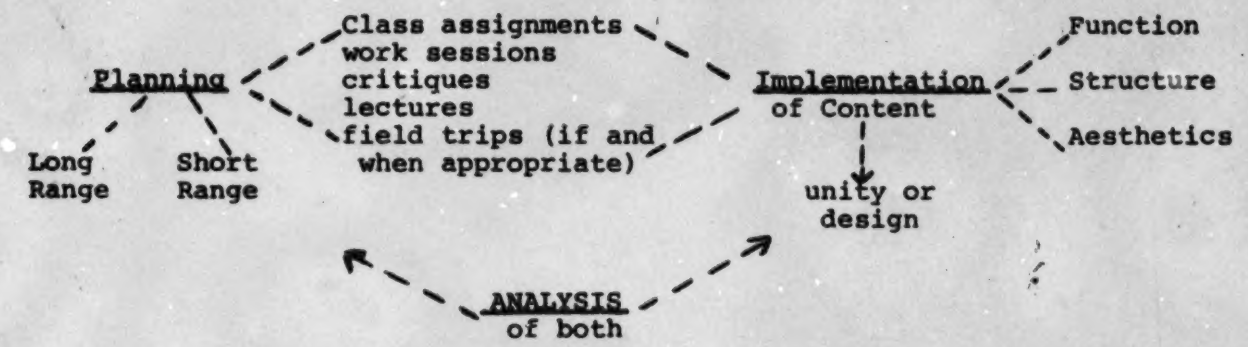
Thus, the data analysis process can be depicted as an ongoing activity, following this schema:

1. Select categories based on statements and actions
2. Find recurring incidents
3. Check indices of conflict, tension, frustration
4. Develop interviews based on observations
5. Check frequency and distribution of statements and actions by category
6. Construct hypotheses and test them
7. Construct a model of the above
8. Recheck and rebuild the model as the data warrants.

I withdrew from the field at the end of the second semester as it was the normal end of the term. Interviews and correspondence continued for the next six months.

Basically this study is a model of curriculum construction with a description and explanation of one professor's philosophy of design. Schematically, speaking:

PLANNING IMPLEMENTATION ANALYSIS



To understand how this model worked on a day-to-day basis, I have chosen to describe a critique session for illustration.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF A CRITIQUE SESSION

The process of the "crit" as it is known among architects, is essential to the design enterprise. As Kane suggested, it is part psychoanalysis, part science, and part fine art. In this design class, there are two problem solving assignments per term, both of which are followed by a thorough critique. The process is two dimensional. On the one hand, the individual's work is criti qued for that individual. On the other hand, the critique is also for all

the group members. They too will learn from one another's critiques as well as their own.

First Class: Assignment I: To observe and Draw a Flower

LAYS OUT FIRST ASSIGNMENT: SPECIFYING

a. Purpose	To observe nature and draw a flower.
b. Types of Materials to be used	Museum board and museum board matte in colored pencils
c. Due date	One week-due date and crit
d. Crit date	

In preparation for this assignment, Professor Kane brought in samples of quartz geodes and seashells. He asked the class to observe the "symmetry" the "unity" and the "character" of the chambered nautilus. While asking the class to observe it, he referred to the flower assignment:

> "Each of you have chosen a flower which is an example of unity with an unlimited choice of character. It has function, structure, and an aethetic module. I call it an 'aesthetic module' for want of a better name." (1--8--79)

He then drew three circles on the board.

He stated, "the area which is colored in, is the unity, the design." Thus, the first part of the crit process is to show an example of what the assignment is about. Next, the student works on his/her design

in the studio. Professor Kane's major rule was this: All design assignments must be done in the studio. He believed that having an identifiable work place would be psychologically better than any other arrangements. Also, there were fewer distractions in the studio. The other two rules for studio life were stated simply as no smoking and no radios. Professor Kane expected total concentration on the task at hand. Following the assignment, the drawings are mounted on the display board and the critique takes place.

CRITIQUE DAY

A week after the assignment was explained, the class arrived earlier than usual. One by one, each person displayed his/her drawing of a flower. All but two drawings were displayed. Professor Kane entered the room confidently, turned to all of us seated in a semi-circle around the board and said:

> "Remember, this is not a personal critique of you... don't take it personally...." (1--16--79)

He continued:

> "If I could pick out the strongest use of color, narrative, form -- If I were to pick out the ones that do that best I would pick these. [He points to each] Now, look at the commonalities in the three drawings -- focus the eye -- look at the contrasts of value, of scale, of hue, of chroma all of which pull to the focus of the drawing. Look at the composition in Number One here -- good work Amy. I'll come back to this. Look here at Number Two, this one is unique in the contrast of FORM. It is analogous to balance. Again, I'll return to this.

> Look at Number Three -- I believe these are poppies? [He looks to the student who nods affirmatively.] This one has contrasts in balance, weight, form, hue, value. This helps to read the form of the flower." (1--16--79)

Following this Professor Kane returned to each drawing and devoted about 25-30 minutes on each, critiquing the drawings in view of all the elements of design mentioned in lectures to date. Following this, the class broke for lunch. The afternoon session followed the same pattern and carried over to the next day for completion.

Here was more than a simple critique. This critique was continued into the next major assignment. Professor Kane raised the same questions and issues for each student in the following critique of Assignment II. For most students, no significant improvement took place and indeed the three best designs in Assignment I, were also among the four best designs of Assignment II. The gestation period of taking in crit comments and applying the suggestions to the next assignment is a Herculean effort. One short term is not enough time for attaining a managable degree of sophistication in design. This would be akin to having a prospective surgeon reach a high level of expertise in surgery after one term of in-class assignments. Professor Kane put it this way:

> "It's impossible to do in one term all that it takes to be excellent in design. That takes a lifetime." (1--12--79)

Professor Kane planned his lectures on a long range and short range basis. In the long range, he had a definite amount of material

which fell under the three basic headings, Form, Structure, Aesthetics. In work sessions, as he walked from student to student observing and commenting on their work, he used material from the lectures. At the same time he would draw out examples from their readings in the history of architecture. For example, while looking at a student painstakingly trying to redo a floor plan for a shopping center Kane said:

> "Do you recall Frank Lloyd Wright's waterfall house? [The student gave little sign of remembering.] Do you remember how Wright used the natural environment of a waterfall with water running through the house and the sections of the house, as if sculpted rocks?
>
> "Look at your plan. Are you using your natural environment?" (2--7--79)

In the shorter range, Kane planned as he needed to. He described it as "day to day" planning.

> "I never say that on such and such a day I'll give this lecture. It's not really linear. I can't teach it with a preconception of what I'm going to say in next week's class. I have to see their work (the students) then decide. You see, I've developed the ability to look at the work and immediately comment on what needs to be done for that student, I plan in the biggest sense. It's constantly with me. It's my life work. I do day to day planning, short range planning, after I meet with the students. You get to know the students very well. You end up teaching by tutorial with crits at their desks." (1--29--79)

The planning of the content of the course was also the implementation of the content. By physical examples, rocks, geodes, shells, other drawings or examples recalled from history, the element of Function, Structure, or Aesthetics was ever before the student. The class

assignments, in-class work sessions and critiques served as the framework for reiterating abstractly and particularly what design is about. All the while, Kane was analyzing each students' progress in the design class by lengthy critiques reiterating principles the student needed to know. One might say, Professor Kane was the curriculum of Design 341.

SUMMARY

The findings suggest a case of a carefully constructed curriculum in architectural design. Professor Kane developed a systematic sequence of assignments which tested the application of all the principles of design he spoke of in his lectures and critiques. He viewed his work as professional. He saw himself as a professional architect preparing prospective architects. He was convinced that his theory of design as a rational activity was the best vehicle for educating his students. He was a man "knowledgeable" in Polanyi's[3] sense of the term. Polanyi described propositional and tacit knowledge the former being composed of interpersonably sharable statements as a result of observation and action. Tacit knowledge is gained from experience with objects and events. The analogue for architecture here would look like this: the critique is propositional knowledge, while Kane's experience as a professional architect, researcher, air force intelligence officer, artist, and professor account for tacit knowledge.

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[3]Polanyi's theory is presented in detail in his work Personal Knowledge, 1958.

ISSUES FOR CURRICULUM INQUIRY

A basic problem in the field of curriculum, is that of developing research methods suited to curriculum questions. In this ethnographic case study, there is a model for curriculum research seeking to obtain descriptive data and to suggest further inquiry and theory building. The exploratory questions which guided this study were three:

1. What elements are involved in the enterprise of teaching architectural design at the university level by a professional architect turned teacher?

2. How does an individual implement a design curriculum?

3. Can design, in and of itself, be taught?

These questions emerged as a result of basic premises of symbolic interactionism, the theory which guided the study. I would like to briefly describe the basic thrust of this theory and the methodology of participant observation. Once this is done, it will be easy to see how curriculum questions are suited to ethnographic research techniques.

THEORETICAL WARRANT

This study was inspired by the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. This theory views man's experience as an interpretive process. (See Blumer 1969, Mead 1934, Thomas 1923 and Garfinkel 1964, Manis and Meltzer 1972.) As Blumer recounts:

> "We can, and I think, must look upon human life as chiefly a vast interpretive process in which people, singly and collectively, guide themselves by defining the objects events and situations which they encounter."

For the Interactionist, the methodology of participant observation is particularly well suited to discovering how people interpret their social reality. This method rests on a phenomenological paradigm.[4] (See Filstead, 1970, 1976.) Basically, the phenomentologist would claim that human beings live in a world which has meaning for him/her self. Human beings can be understood in a manner that other objects of study cannot. Phenomenology stresses understanding which focuses on the meaning of human behavior within a given social context including understanding the thoughts as well as actions of a given person. Likewise, the symbolic interactionist would say that what people do depends on what meanings they give to their everyday-life situations. In other words, what people do depends on how they define their situations. (See Thomas 1923.)

In this study, Professor Kane viewed his work as his life. He viewed the profession of architecture with high esteem and respect. He wanted his students to be excellent in that profession. He defined his situation as professor of design as significant and in a global sense as contributing to the profession. Underlying his work was his quest "to know," and "to search for fundamentals." He believes his theory of design to be a significant statement of how art and science come together for both have "common aims."

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[4]For an extensive explanation of phenomenology, see The Encyclopedia of Philosophy Volumes V--VI, pp. 135-151. The term "phenomenology" is often interchanged and substituted in the literature for "qualitative method," "participant observation," "Verstehen," "field methods," "symbolic interactionism" and Gestalt psychology. For a discussion of the underlying premises of phenomenology see William J. Filstead's "Sociological Paradigms of reality" in Phenomenology Structuralism Semiology, Edited by Harry R. Garvin.

In this study participant observation was used in order to get at the meanings in Kane's world as a professor of architectural design. By using participant observation, I received more complete information about events and beliefs which may have escaped, had I used another method. Simply stated, if I saw an event occur, and saw what preceded and followed that event, and could interview Kane about it, I would then have reasonable data to make statements about that event. Consequently I learned about how a curriculum was constructed in architectural design and learned about the person who designed that curriculum. I can safely say that I learned about the design of design and in a sense the designer, the architect, the artist, the professor was indeed the main element in that curriculum. I conclude that curriculum researchers could and should make use of ethnographic techniques under certain conditions:

A) <u>The researcher should pose questions appropriate for ethnographic studies</u>. For example, there are certain types of questions amenable to ethnographic techniques:

1. Questions about social systems.
2. Questions about the structure of such systems or the structure of groups.
3. Questions of the functions of language or questions of a socio-linguistic nature.
4. Questions on meaning, or the process of interpretation, or questions inspired by symbolic interactionism.

5. Questions about the quality of some aspect of schooling, Such as an innovation or aspects of a curriculum.

6. Questions of a holistic nature.

Certain questions are appropriate and others therefore are not. Furthermore, working out in the field does not constitute ethnography in and of itself. Examples of questions not conducive to ethnographic techniques would be measuring effects of a treatment or coming in a classroom with a set of predetermined categories to code instruction. One of the basic principles of an ethnographic approach is that the researcher does not develop prior categories. The categories are identified after being a participant observer in the social setting over time.

B) <u>The researcher should understand the basic philocophic and historical underpinnings of ethnographic techniques</u>.

Historically, the French philosopher Joseph-Marie Dege'rando wrote the first field guide for ethnographers in 1800. His paper "Considerations on Various Methods to Follow in the Observation of Savage People"[5] was the first description of the method of participant observation. In the 19th century, Franz Boas developed the technique of interviewing key informants in a social setting. In the 20th Century, Bronislaw Malinowski emphasized participant observation as we now know it.[6] Sociologists as well as anthoropolgists, have used

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[5]This in no way is meant to refer to the schools of today.

[6]For a detailed description of the history of ethnography see the <u>Handbook of Social and Cultural Anthropology</u> (ed.) John Honigmann.

participant observation, particularly those sociologists of the Chicago symbolic interaction school. (See Manis and Meltzer 1972.)

Philosophically, ethnographic approaches to research can be traced to phenomenology. Phenomenology grew and developed in Europe at the same time Analytic philosophy thrived in Great Britain and the United States. These two traditions represent differing views of man and social reality. Basically the phenomenologist would say that a social scientist,

> "cannot understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which the subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions." (Wilson, 1977)

Severyn Bruyn (1966) juxtaposes the analytic view traditionally held by researchers with that of the phenomenological view:

> "The traditional empiricist considers himself (as a scientist) to be the primary source of knowledge, and trusts his own senses and logic more than he would trust that of his subjects. The participant observer, on the other hand, considers the interpretations of his subjects to have first importance.... By taking the role of his subjects he recreates in his own imagination and experience the thoughts and feelings which are in the minds of those he studies." (p. 12)

Tracing the philosophic history of the two traditions, one can see the divergence even though many lines can be crossed between analytic and phenomenological philosophies.[7] For the purposes of this paper, I would like to depict graphically the philosophical shades of difference between the two traditions for researchers in curriculum who are interested.

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[7]A more detailed paper on the Divergence and Convergence of Analytic and Phenomenological approaches to research is in progress by this writer.

OVERVIEW OF ANALYTIC AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRADITIONS

PHENOMENOLOGICAL

Shades of Realism
meanings have an existence of their own (Husserl broke with this view, yet remains the foremost phenomenologist)

The Flavor of Rationalism
Descartes
Spinoza
Leibniz

The Clamor of Idealism
the activity of the "I" ideal component of knowledge is the "I"

The Fragrance of Transcendentalism
that which lies before experience

Chief Spokespersons
Husserl, Scheler, Heidigger, Jaspers, Hartmann, Merleau-Ponty

Others associated with
Meinong, Frege, Lotze, Stumpf.

Influences in Education
Piaget
Chomsky
Schutz

ANALYTIC

Shades of Nominalism
meanings do not exist, in themselves.

The Flavor of Empiricism
Locke
Berkeley
Hume
John Stuart Mill

The Clamor of Pragmatism
usefulness of an activity

The Fragrance of Linguistic Philosophy
the rules governing ordinar language

Chief Spokespersons
Wittgenstein, Moore, Ryle

Others associated with
The Vienna Circle members: Schlick, Carnap, Neurath; Russell and Whitehead; Popp Dewey, James

Influences in Education
Skinner
Peters, R. S.
Phenix

For the social scientist, these differences in the traditions are healthy for they compel further research and development. They force researchers to refine meanings, to clarify terms, and to revise statements. Both traditions leave room for philosophy, and factual and logical analysis. For the future, researchers, particularly researchers in the field of curriculum might do well to look into ethnographic techniques.

> "Ethnography is not just a new fad; rather it is a part of a long-respected research tradition that for various historical reasons has remained outside the mainstream of educational research. Similarly, it is not a static tradition; researchers are constantly working to refine the methods. At present, investigators are examining ways in which qualitative and quantitative approaches can supplement each other and the ways teams of qualitative researchers can be used to guarantee multiple perspectives." (Wilson, 1977, p. 263)

As an ethnographer, I see a positive future for educational research in general and curriculum research in particular. This method provides us with descriptive data about curriculum construction in this case. In the study of Joshua Kane, if I were to draw out a theoretical model here, I would say this: <u>The teacher was the curriculum</u>. Each part of his course in some part reflected parts of his own experience and action. He made his goals the goals of the course. He expected his students to do the high quality work he himself did. He used the language of his profession and expected his students to do the same. Every critique and lecture made use of his theory of design and he currently is in the process of writing a book on the theory of architectural

design. For these reasons, I conclude that he, the professor, of architectural design was the curriculum. Further case studies of teachers of specific content areas may provide additional description and explanation for educational researchers. I for one will be involved in that enterprise.

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